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# *Melodic Arpeggios and Triad Combining for Bass*

BY John Patitucci

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# Melodic Arpeggios and Triad Combining for Bass

*By*
**John Patitucci**

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## Forward by John Patitucci

Some of you may wonder why I would write a book about arpeggios, as there are already many method books out there addressing this topic. Since I was trained in classical music as well as jazz, I personally worked through many of these books over the last 35 years, and the difficulty is that pattern-oriented arpeggio exercises can become tedious. It is my goal to give us all material to practice that will keep us engaged and help us grow. If we can enjoy working on these crucial building blocks, we will buy ourselves a tremendous amount of freedom when it comes to expression, whether we are dealing with the music of Mozart or Coltrane.

This book will address the following concepts:

1. Preparatory exercises that deal with shifting on a single string and developing intonation and left hand articulation, plus right hand control issues related to both pizzicato and arco playing. Included in this section is an exercise for scales on each individual string that takes us through all 12 keys, to be practiced very slowly in order to prepare us for the substantial amount of shifting we do when playing arpeggios. It is important to practice different fingerings for varied musical situations depending on tempo, articulation, and stylistic interpretation. These exercises are foundational and help us focus on our sound quality and rhythmic control.
2. String crossing exercises that deal with wider intervals and prepare our ears and hands to focus on the intervals, hear the note we are shifting to, then execute the shift with ease and musicality.
3. Arpeggio exercises in intervallic sequences through all 12 keys. The sequences are fully written out at first, for instance, practicing major and minor triads that fall in thirds (A minor, F major, D minor, B-flat major, etc.). I have also included sequences for you to improvise your own arpeggio exercises, moving through the major and minor sounds first and then with the diminished and augmented sounds added. The ear training benefits are enormous when you break up the arpeggios in ways that are not pattern-oriented and are more melodically centered. My goal is that we all hear the sounds better and grasp the harmony more deeply as opposed to executing the arpeggios in a purely athletic fashion.
4. Exercises in chord qualities and sounds most commonly used in jazz and many types of modern music. This allows us to hear the chords fully realized in a linear fashion. I believe that practicing these arpeggios will benefit any bassist, regardless of musical style, for ear training purposes, technical formation, and to provide a more interesting arpeggio practice routine.
5. Triad combining exercises. As far as I know, there is no other book for bassists dealing with this subject in such a detailed way as it relates to the construction of chords, improvising over more complex sounds, and developing a profound connection with the bass in relation to all the most commonly used sounds in music. Traditionally, materials on this topic have been more widely used by pianists, guitarists, and horn players.

All of these exercises have been tested on my bass students at The City College of New York in Harlem for the last ten years, and more recently my students at The Berklee School of Music. In addition, I use these exercises myself and am certain that the vast majority of bassists, no matter how many years of experience they have or the skill they possess, will be challenged by the material set forth in this book.

It is my most sincere desire that this book will free us to express ourselves and enjoy playing all kinds of music with greater depth of musicality and beauty.

God bless you,
John Patitucci

## EPISODE 1

## Exercise 1
## Intonation Exercises

---

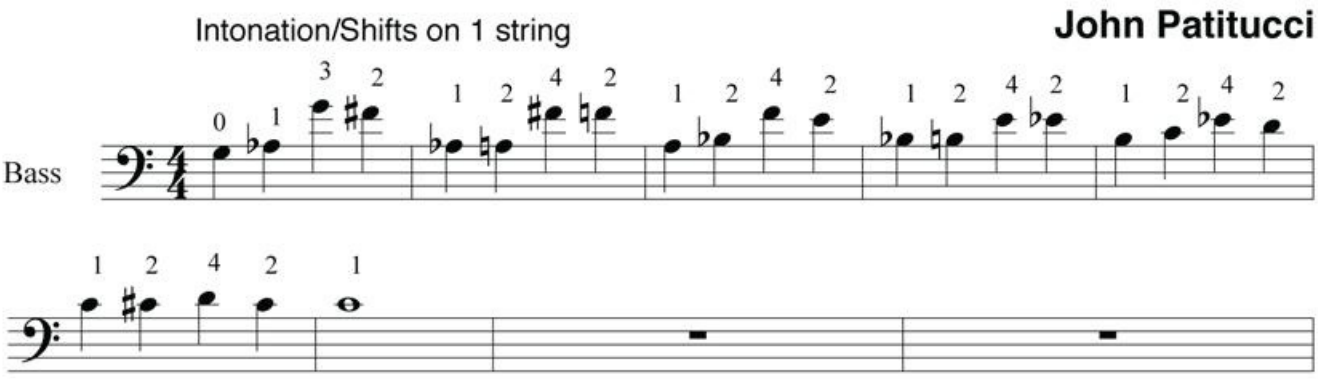
To be done with shifts on one string.

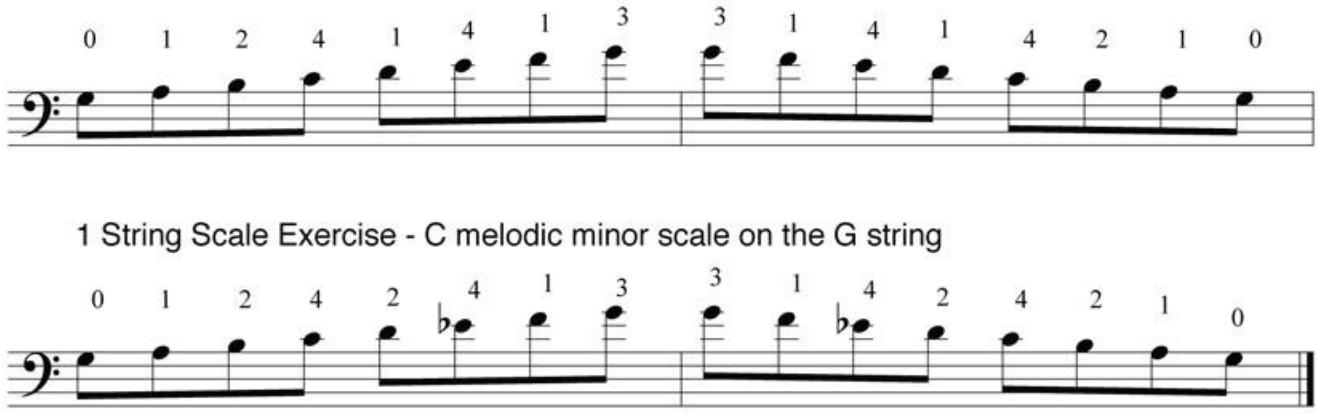
This exercise helps us to:

1. Prepare for the many shifts we make when playing arpeggios on the bass.
2. Work on our left hand position, making sure the hand is lined up well, so that all notes available to us in each position are blocked out and in tune. For instance, if we are in half position: our 1st finger on A-flat, 2nd finger on A natural, and 4th finger (with 3rd next to it) on B-flat. The idea in shifting is that the arm glides up and down while the fingers act like calipers, only adjusting slightly as the space between the notes becomes smaller as we go higher up the neck. We should not readjust the shape of the hand drastically while shifting positions or between notes in a position. Of course, there are exceptions, when one is employing extended positions with pivoting (this is common in the Rabbath approach). I feel that it is important to understand and be able to use the more traditional left hand approaches and incorporate the newer ideas into a left hand concept that is already stable and reliable.
3. Use a very slow portamento (slides between the notes) with the bow or pizz. The idea is to slur two notes in one bow, then when you get comfortable with that, try four notes in a bow. For pizz, try picking once and hammering on with your left hand so that one plucked note in the right hand sounds two for the left hand.
4. Avoid overshooting the note and landing sharp, or undershooting the note and landing flat. The idea is to slide very slowly and stop right on the pitch. Use a tuner from time to time to see what your ear's tendencies are when playing these wide intervals.
5. Try to sing with your playing and train your ear to hear the note you are shifting to. In this way, you would play the first two quarter notes of each measure and sing the last two. So, in measure one of the first part where you are on the G string, play the open G to the A-flat using first finger on the A-flat. Then sing the high G and the high F#. If you can sing that shift with the interval of a major 7th between A-flat and high G, your chances of playing it in tune will be much better, I promise you!
6. Use open strings to check your intonation progress at the end of each bar:
   Bar 1: Play Open D under the F# at the end of the bar
   Bar 2: Open D again under the F natural at the end of the bar
   Bar 3: Open A under the E natural
   Bar 4: Open A under E-flat (listen carefully to tune the tritone)
   Bar 5: Open D octave under D on G string (you can also check with the harmonic under the note D on the G string)

   Here is a simple fingering for the first line on the G string: there are four fingerings per bar, corresponding to the four quarter notes in each bar.
   Bar 1: 0 1 3 2
   Bar 2: 1 2 4 2
   Bar 3: 1 2 4 2
   Bar 4: 1 2 4 2
   Bar 5: 1 2 4 2
   Bar 6: 1 2 4 2
   Bar 7: 1

**Sample fingerings for intonation and 1 string exercises**



**Intonation exercise with shifts on one string**

Slowly, on the G string, first with slides, then without

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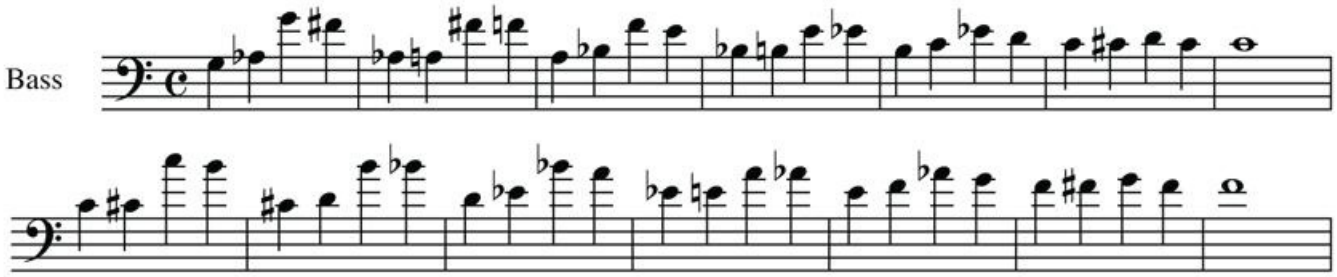
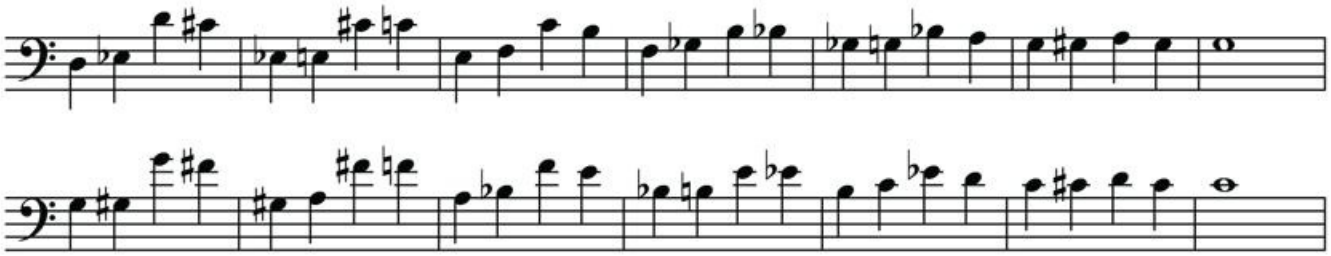
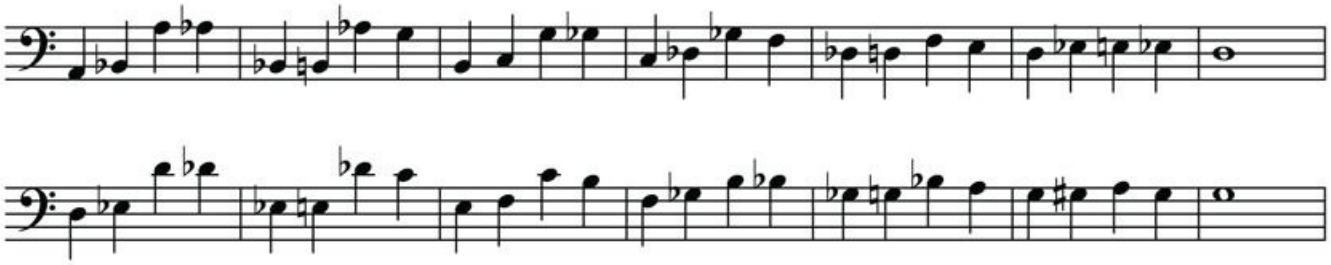


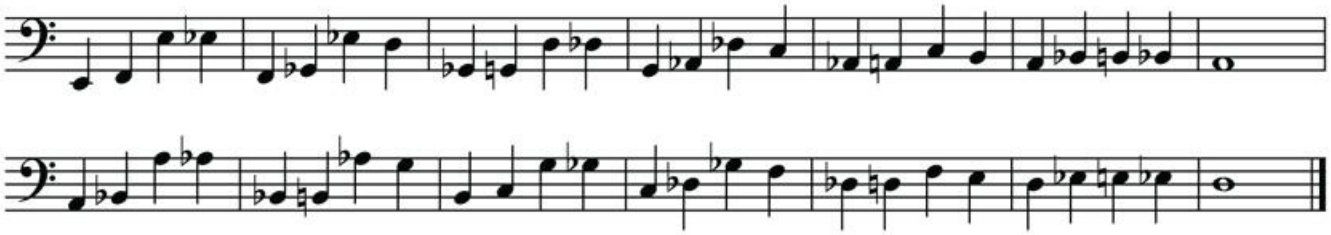

Slowly, on the D string, first with slides, then without



Slowly, on the A string, first with slides, then without



Slowly, on the E string, first with slides, then without



## Exercise 2
## Intonation & Shifting Exercises

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To be done on one string with major and melodic minor scales, in all keys on each string.

This exercise helps us to:

1. Work on our shifts, practice maintaining a solid left hand position and find good fingerings for all 12 major and melodic minor scales on one string at a time, while improving consistency in intonation.
2. Learn the modes of each scale and know the fingerboard better in the process.
3. Work on bow speed and control by practicing this exercise at 8th note = 60 bpm while slurring four 8th notes in a bow, then eight 8th notes in a bow. Then decrease the metronome marking to 50 bpm and finally down to 40 bpm while doing the same slurred groupings of four and eight 8th notes.
4. Refine tonal consistency when shifts are combined with slow bow speeds and long slurred passages.
5. Build a solid foundation and a logical concept for fingering scales. Once major and melodic minors have been learned, then work on harmonic minor, natural minor, diminished, etc.

**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 1 & 2**

MAJOR

PART ONE ON THE G STRING

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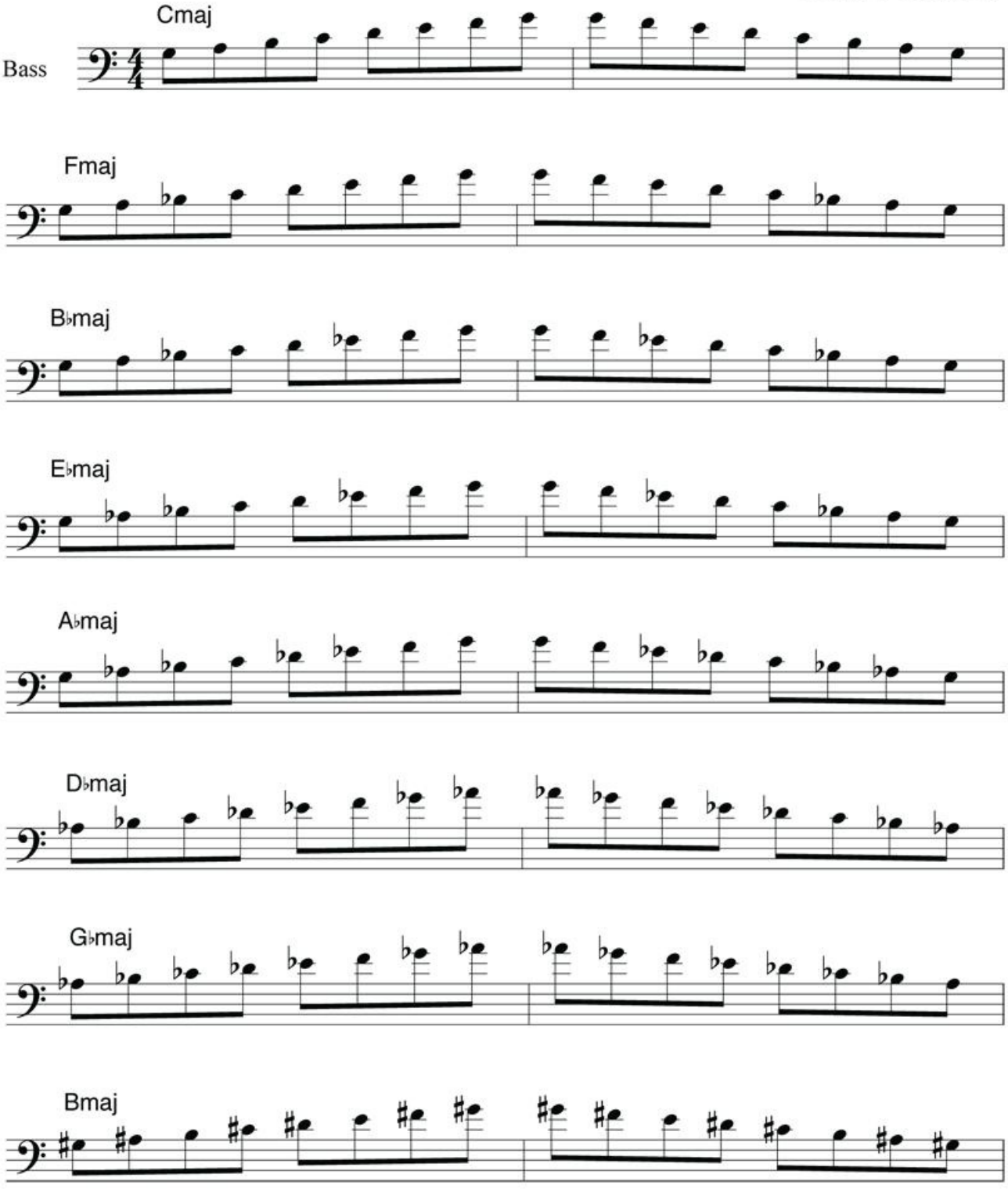
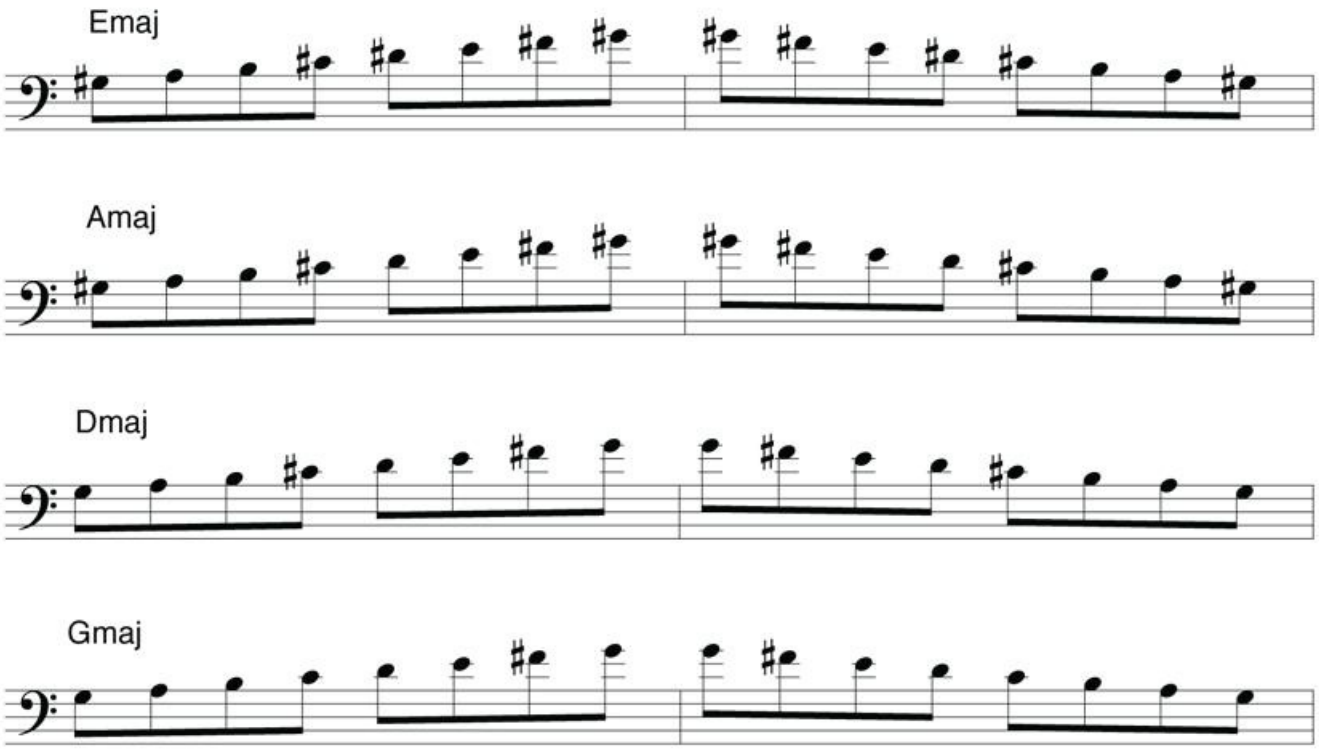
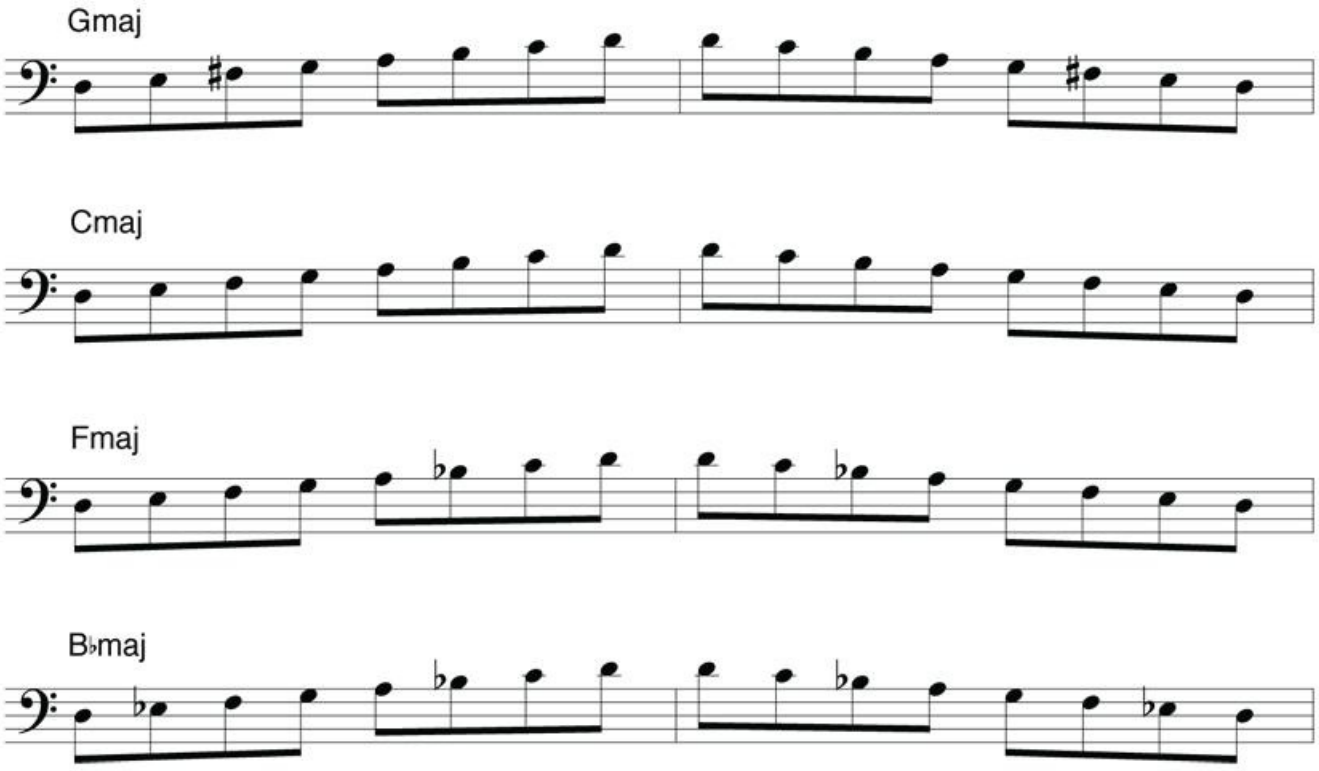


**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 1 & 2**

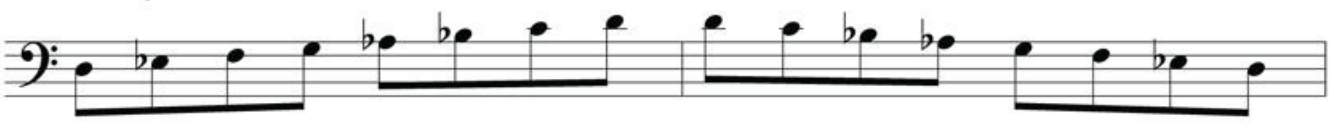



PART TWO ON THE D STRING

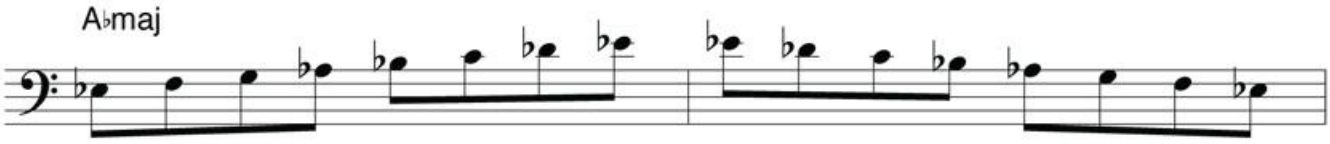


**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 1 & 2**

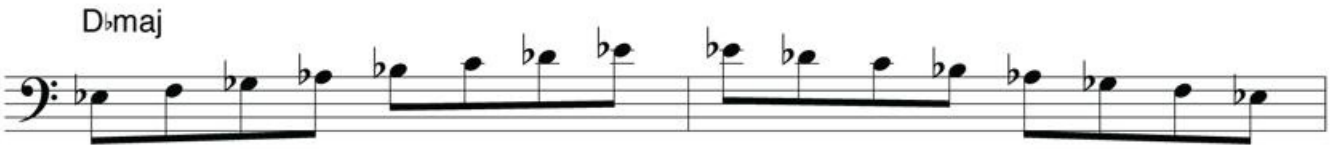
E♭maj



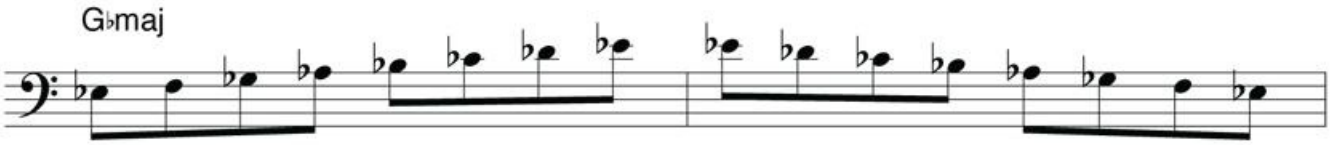
A♭maj



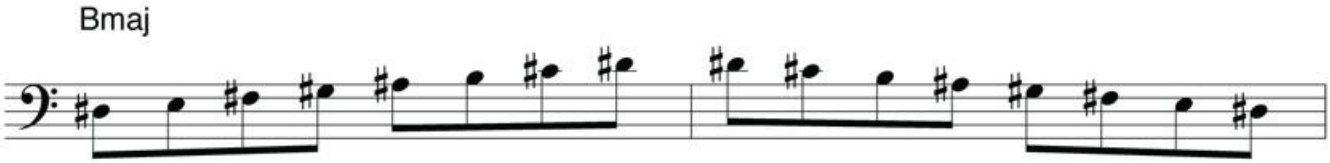
D♭maj



G♭maj



Bmaj



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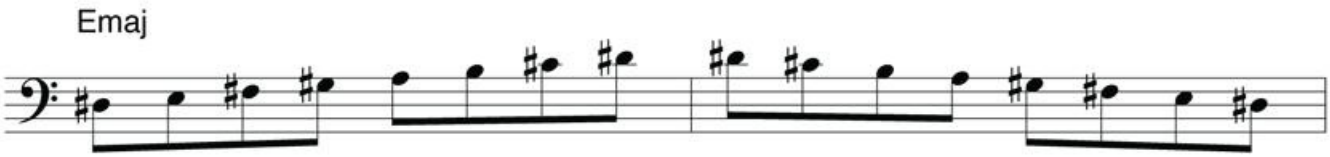

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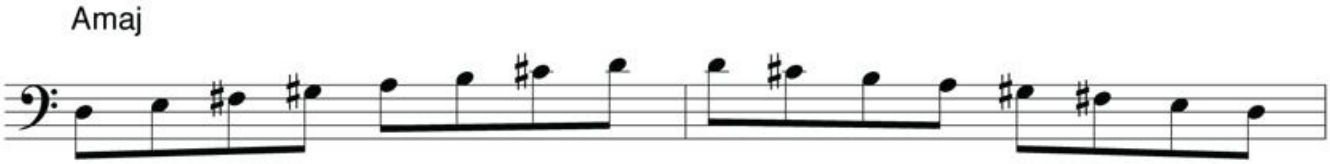

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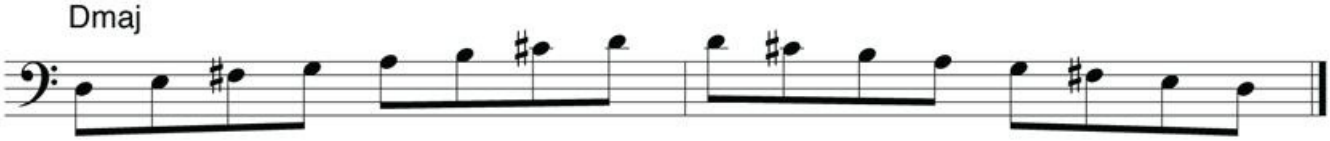

**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 3 & 4**

MAJOR

PART THREE ON THE A STRING

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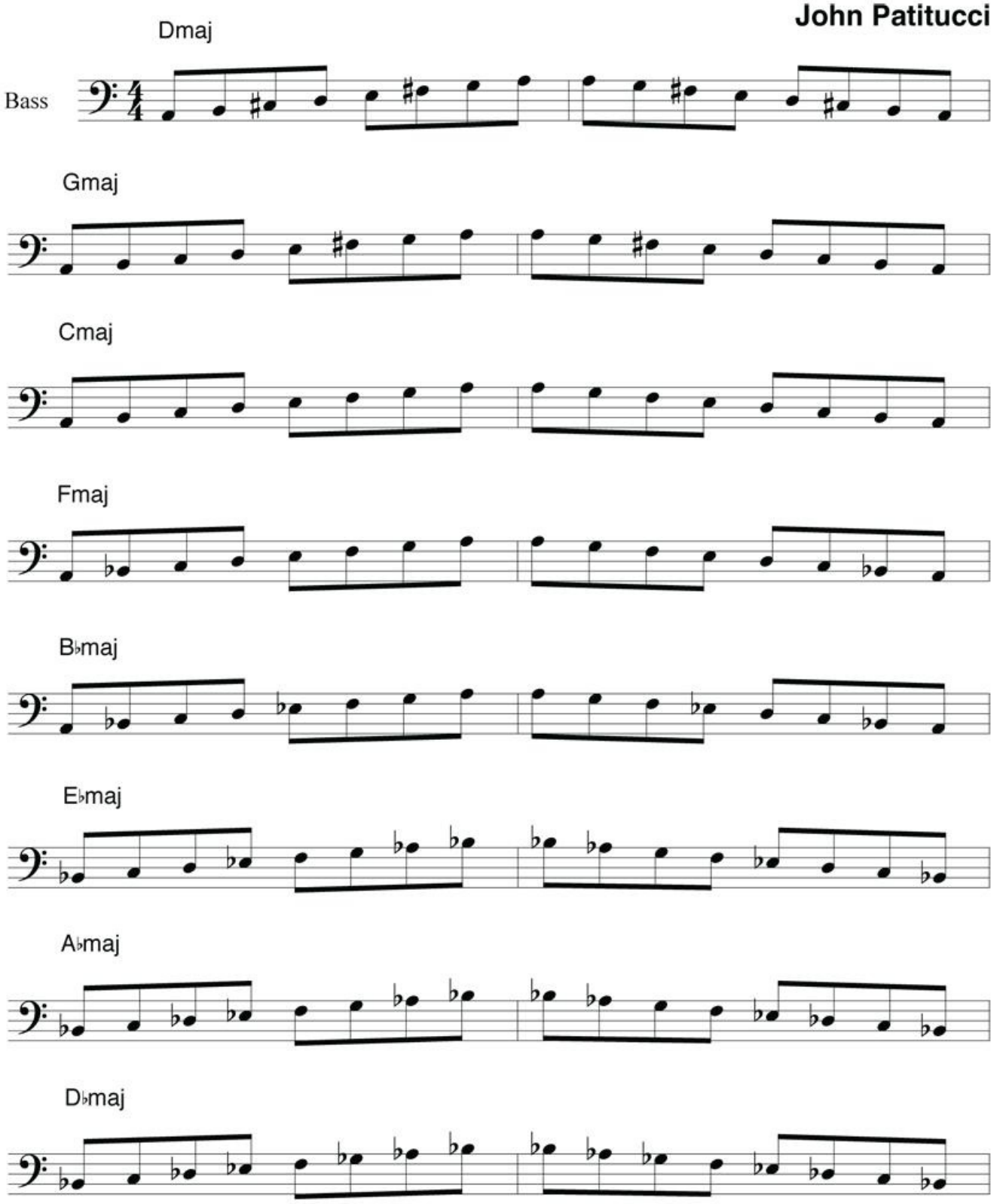
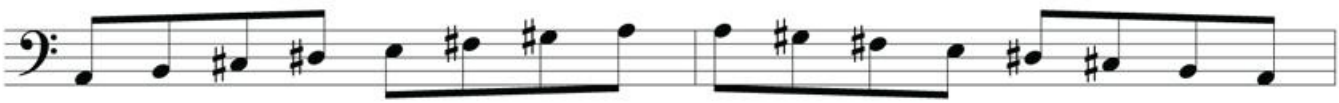


**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 3 & 4**

G♭maj

Bmaj

Emaj



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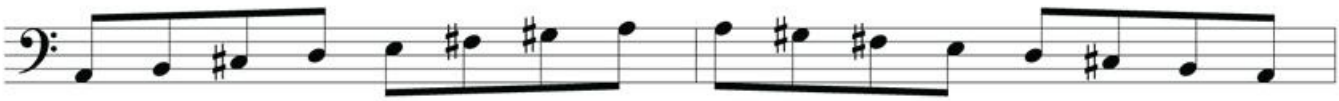
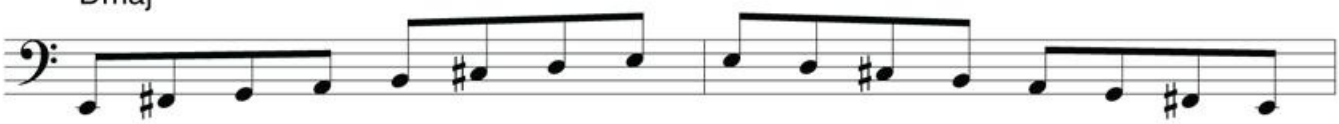


PART FOUR ON THE E STRING

Dmaj



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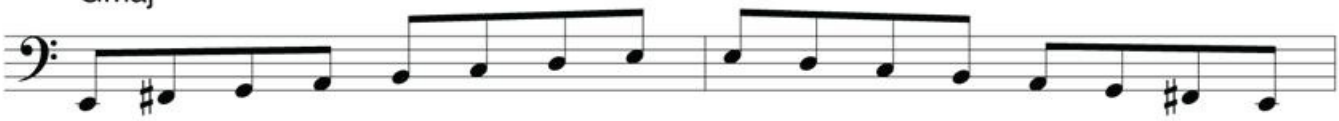

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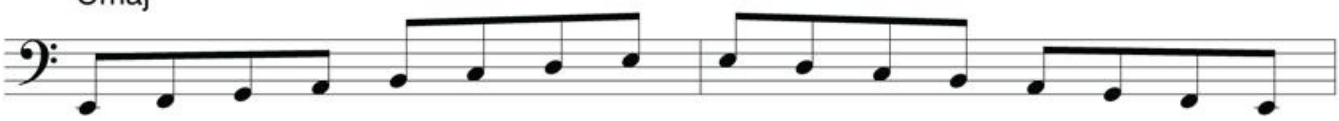

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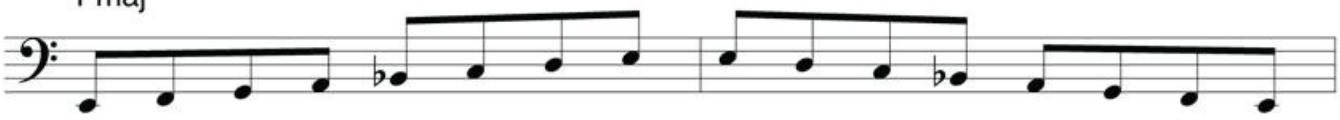
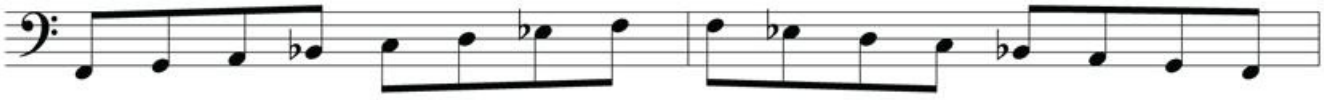


**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 3 & 4**

B♭maj



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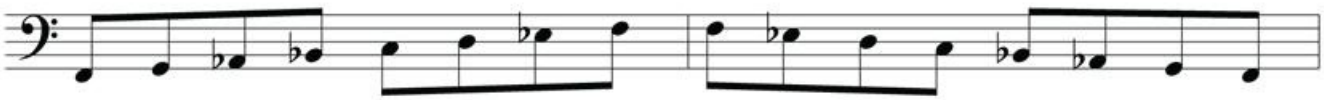

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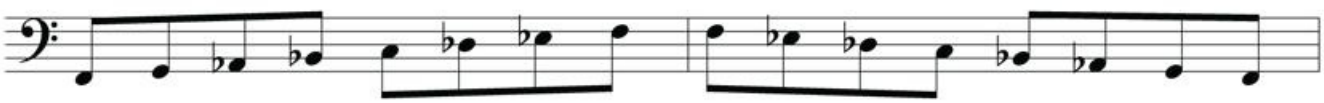

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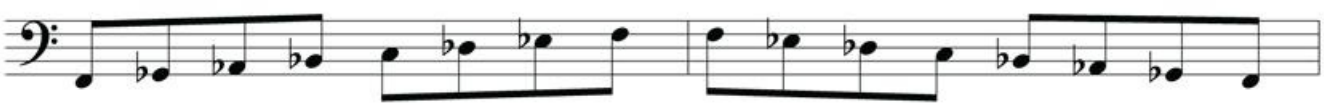

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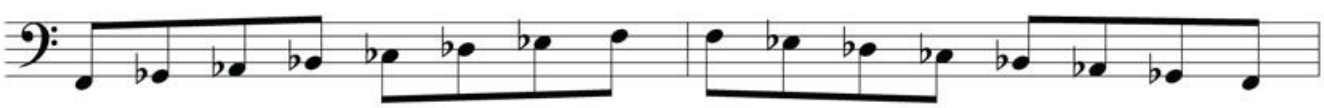

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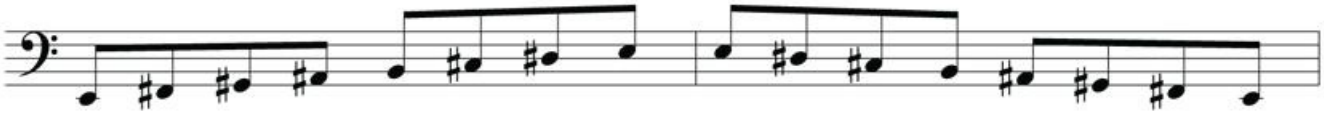

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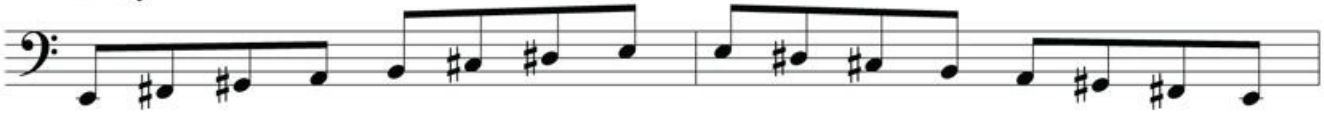

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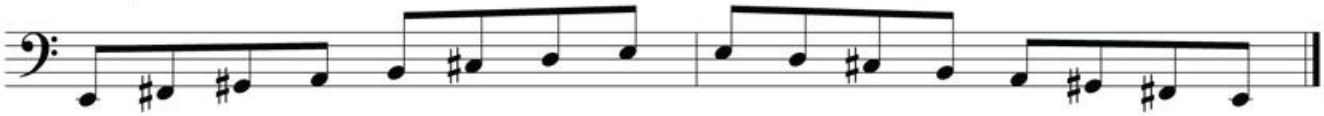
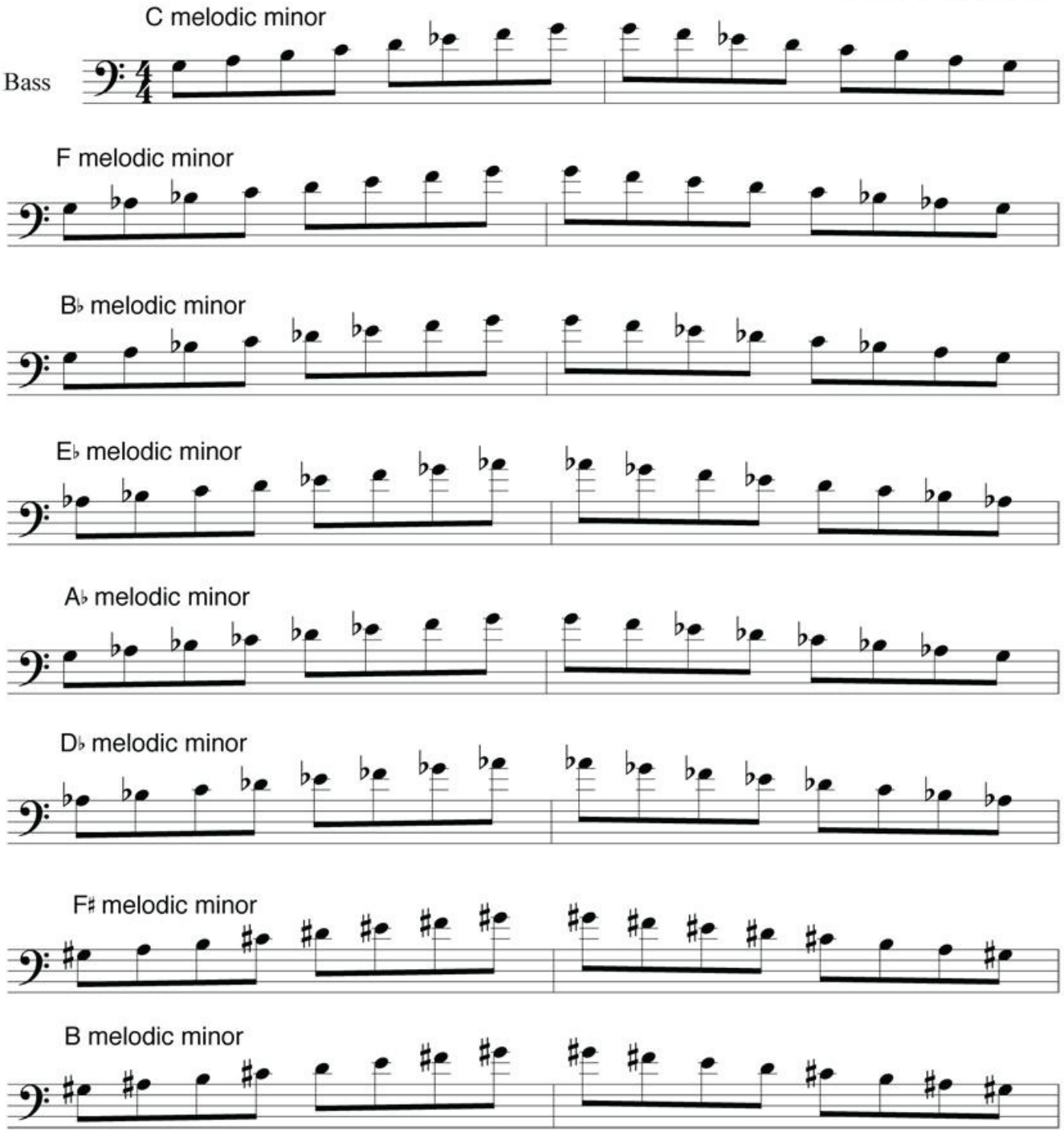


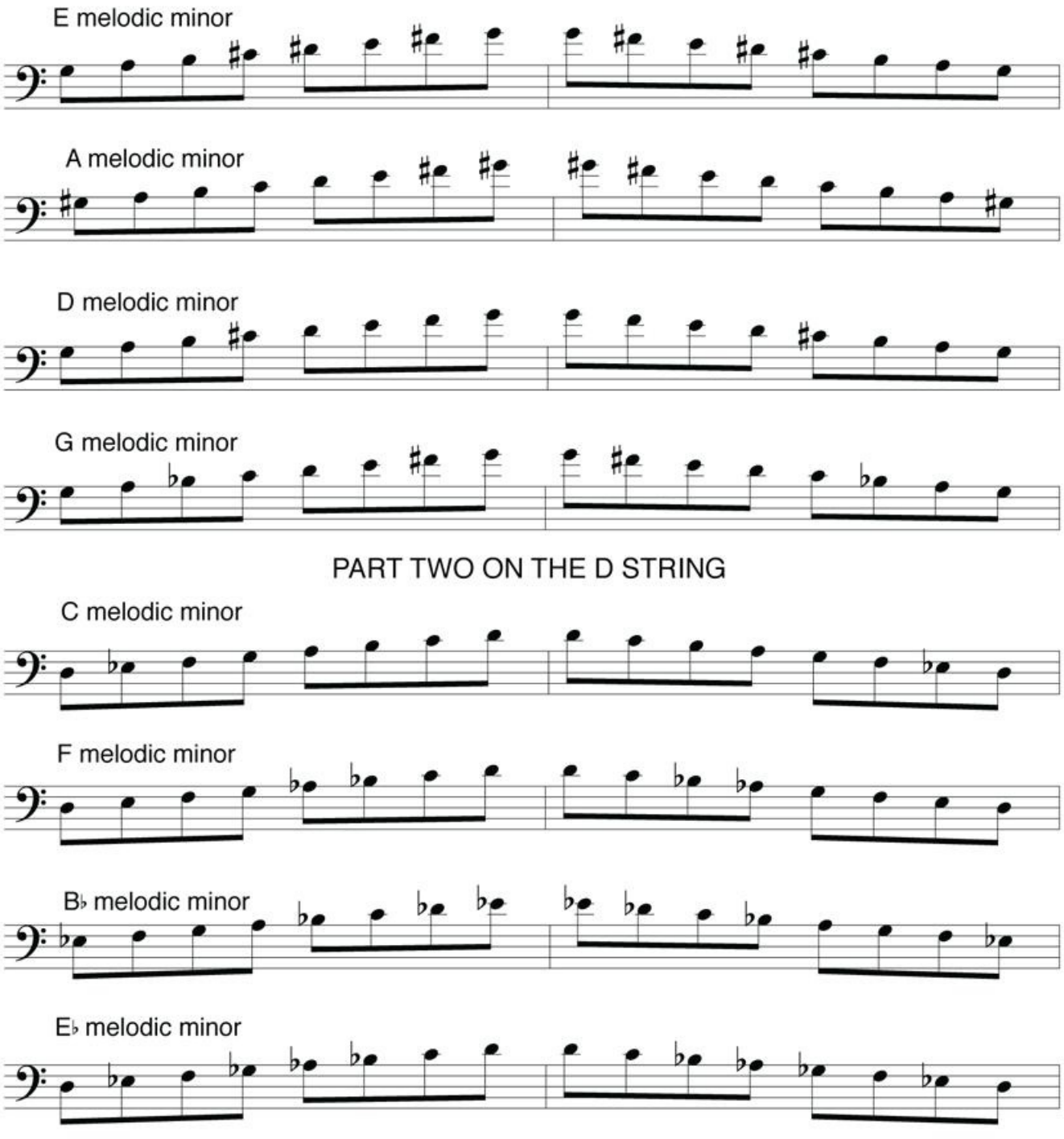
**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 1 & 2**

MELODIC MINOR
PART ONE ON THE G STRING

**John Patitucci**

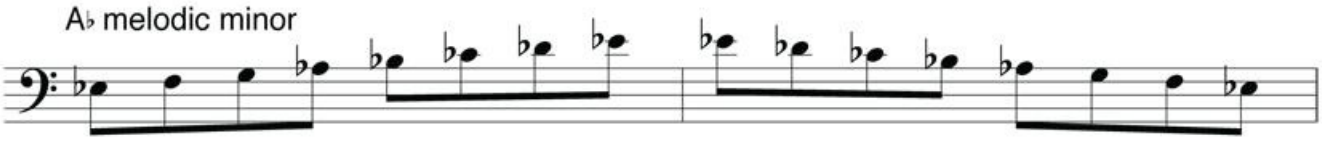


**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 1 & 2**

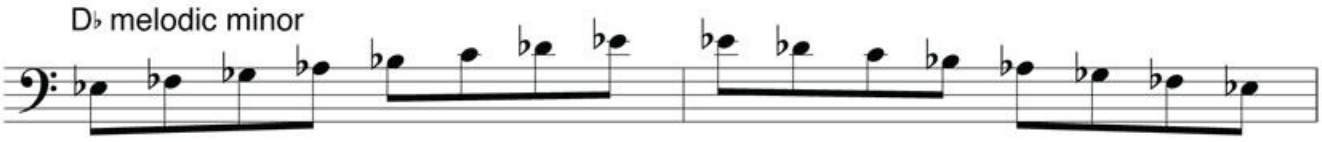


**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 1 & 2**

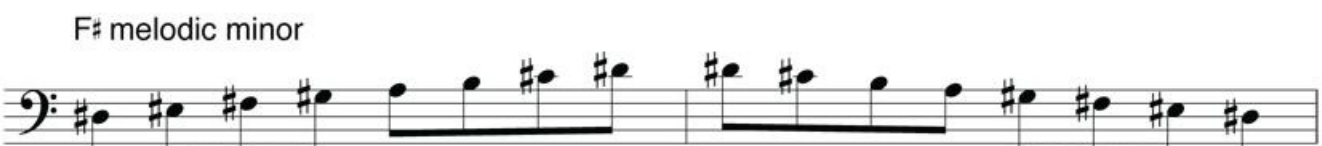
A♭ melodic minor



D♭ melodic minor



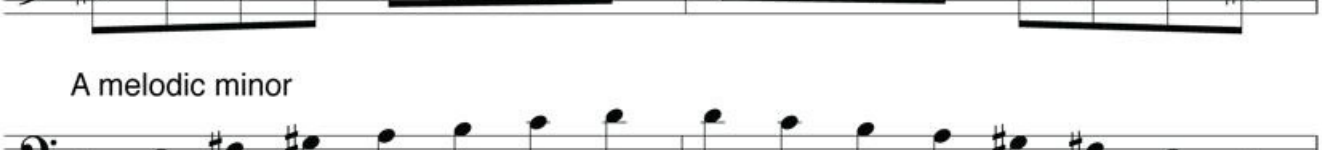
F♯ melodic minor



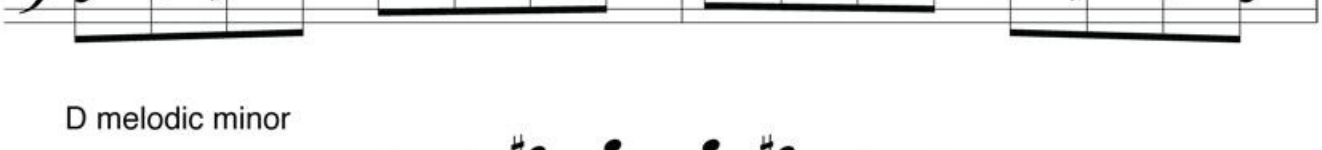
B melodic minor

E melodic minor

A melodic minor



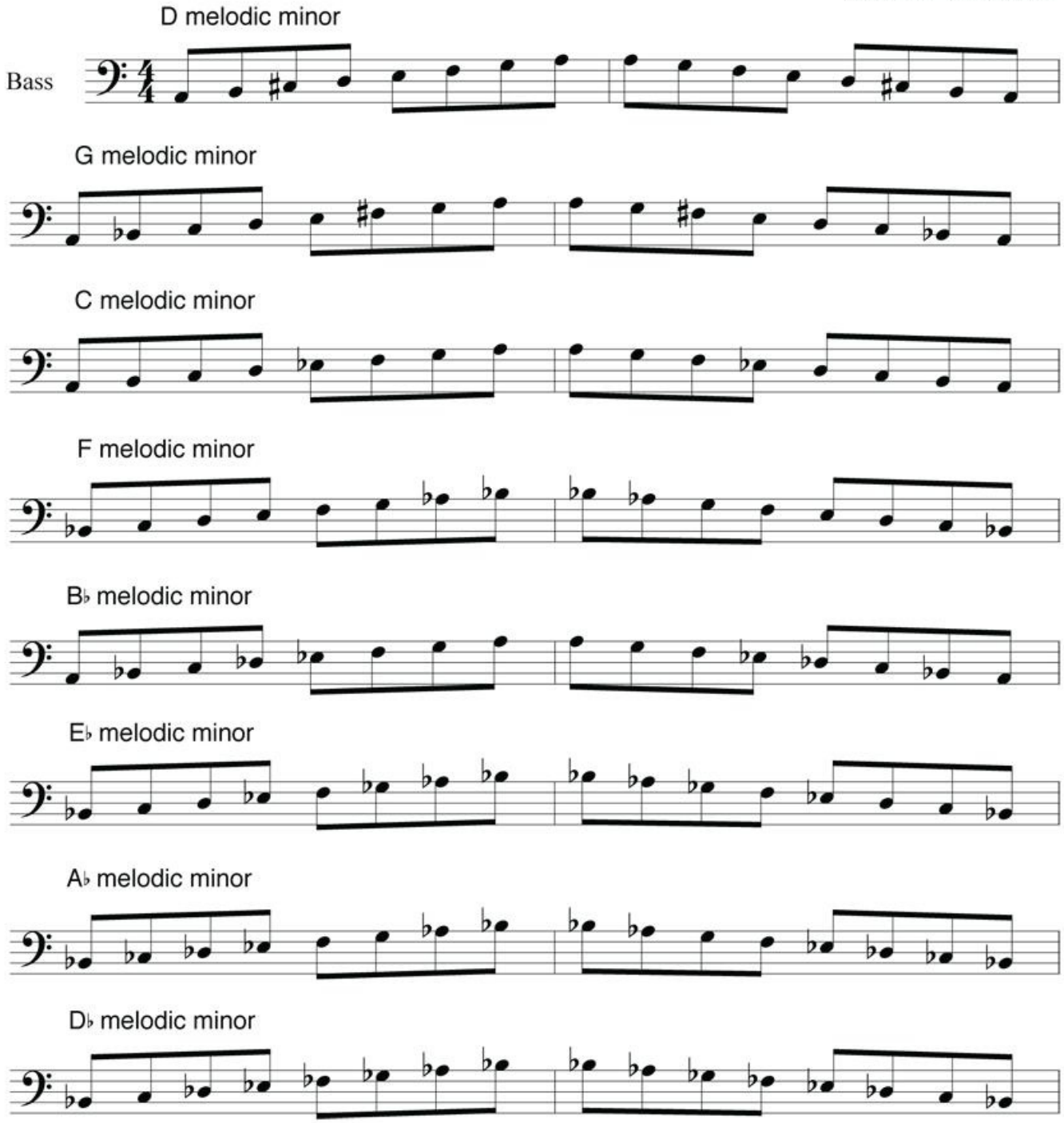
D melodic minor



**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 3 & 4**

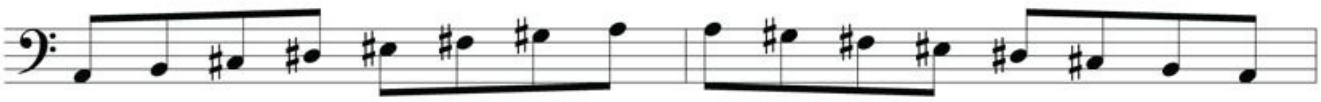
MELODIC MINOR
PART ONE ON THE A STRING

**John Patitucci**



**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 3 & 4**

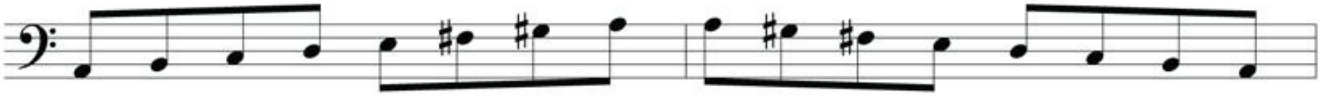
F♯ melodic minor



B melodic minor

E melodic minor

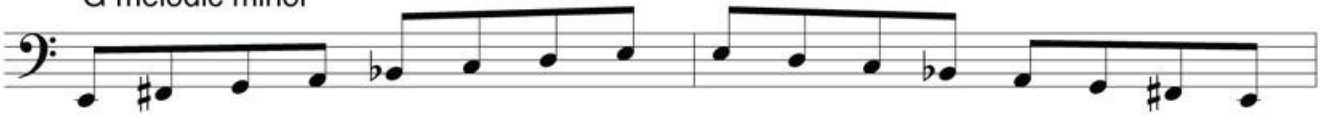
A melodic minor



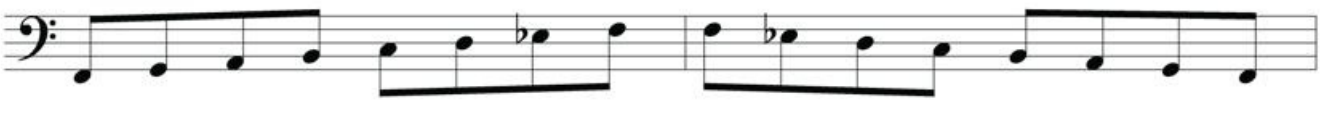
PART FOUR ON THE E STRING

D melodic minor

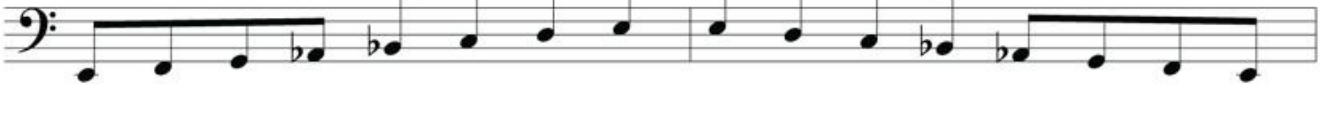
G melodic minor



C melodic minor

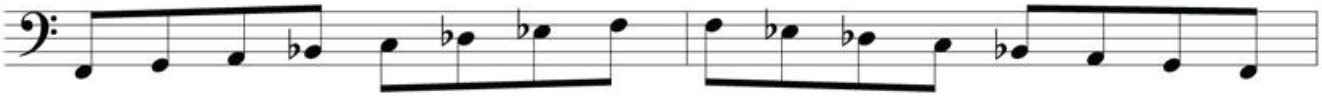


F melodic minor

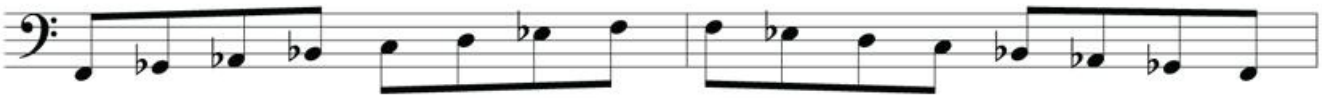


**Intonation/Shifting exercise on one string - Parts 3 & 4**

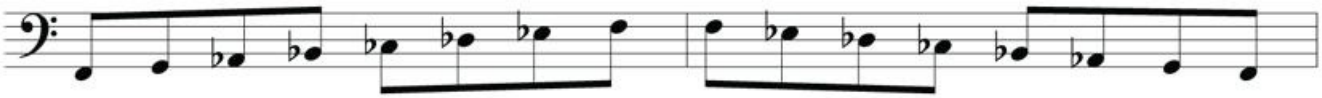
B♭ melodic minor



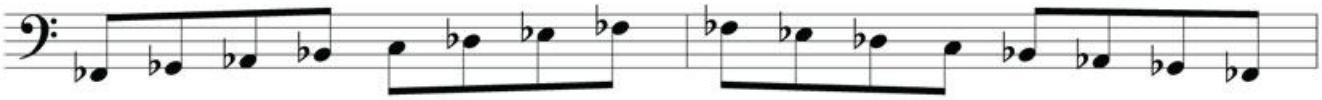
E♭ melodic minor



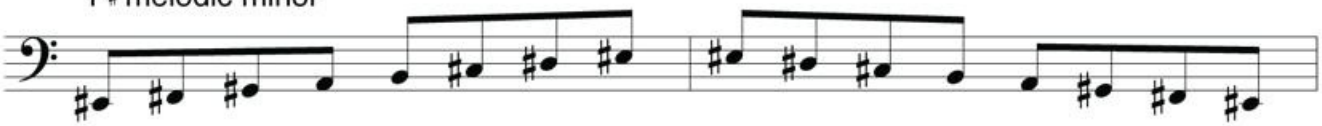
A♭ melodic minor



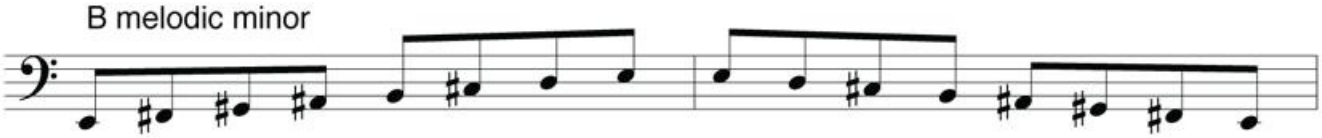
D♭ melodic minor



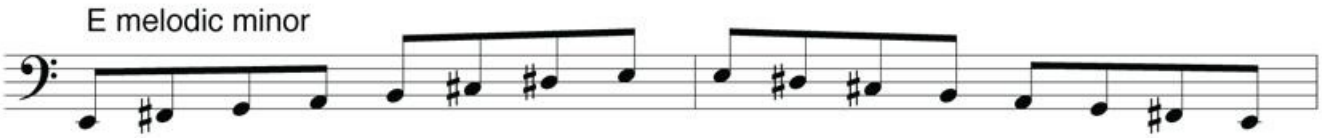
F♯ melodic minor



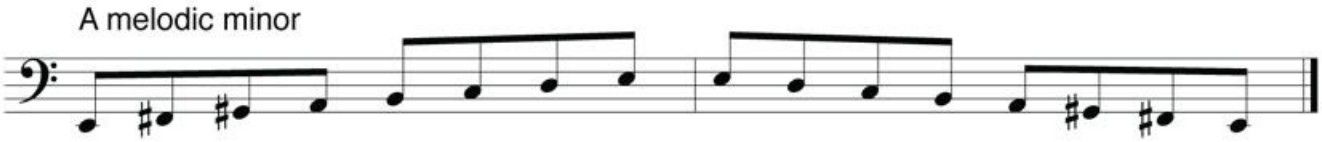
B melodic minor



E melodic minor



A melodic minor



## Exercise 3
## Major 7th with 9th Chord Arpeggio Exercises

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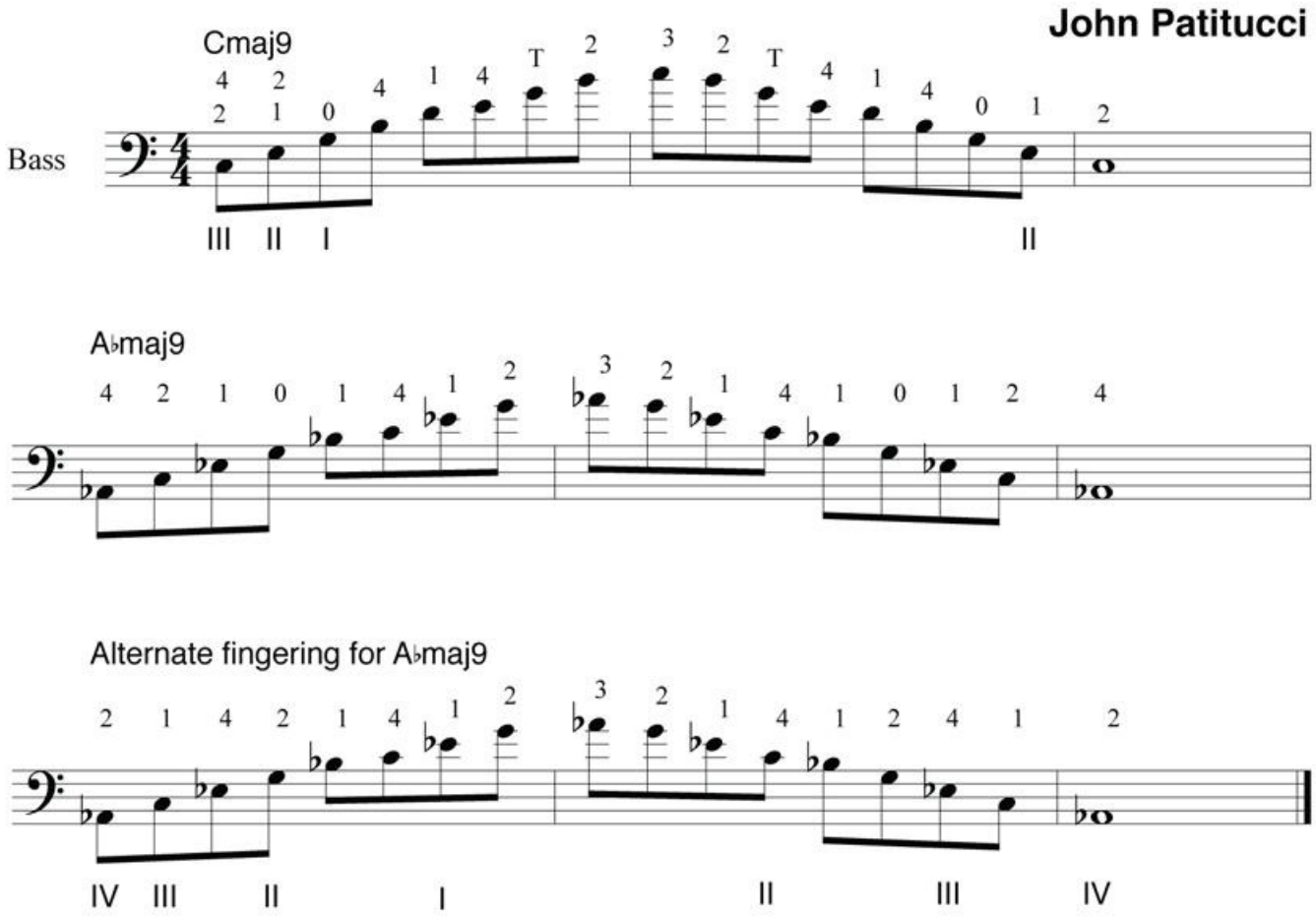
This exercise begins our systematic study of all the different chord qualities expressed in arpeggios, in all keys. This first arpeggio is built on the major 7th sound with the 9th added. Even though there are many books that cover fingerings for major and minor triads in all inversions, they do not cover the chords with extensions found in jazz and other genres.

This exercise helps us to:

1. Hear these sounds better, giving us a better chance at playing in tune.
2. Find several fingerings for each arpeggio while learning a particular chord sound in all 12 keys.
3. Develop coordination for smooth shifting through chord sounds over a two-octave span.
4. Learn to smoothly navigate string crossings in the right hand, whether pizzicato or arco.
5. Facilitate bow control and tonal consistency by slurring four 8th notes in a bow at 80 bpm, then eight 8th notes at 80 bpm. Then decrease bpm to 70, 60, etc. while slurring four or eight 8th notes.

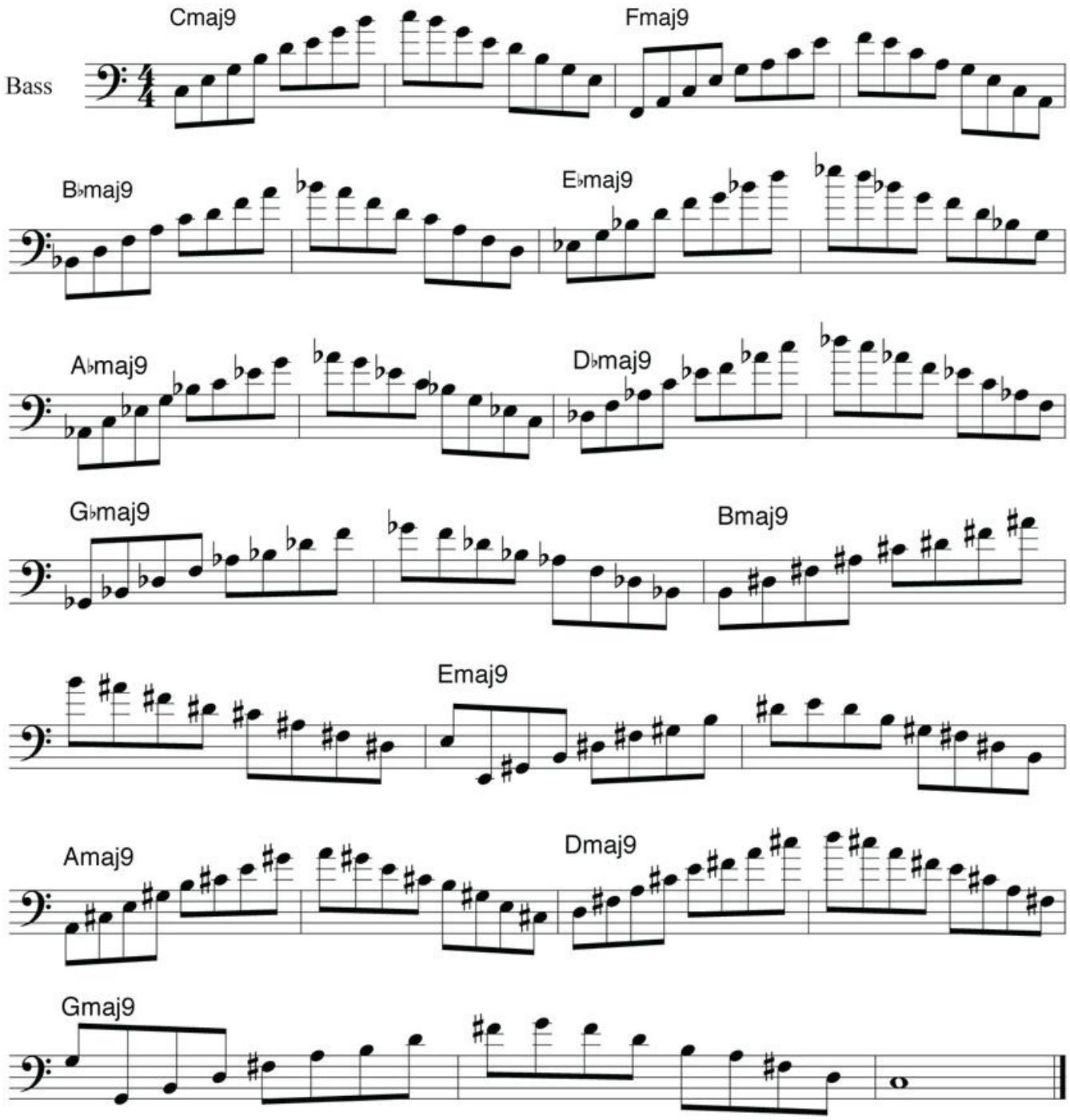
Here are sample fingerings for C major 9 and also A-flat major 9:

**Sample Fingerings for Major 7w/ 9 arpeggio exercise**



**Major 7th w/ 9th arpeggio exercise**

**John Patitucci**



## Exercise 4
## Major 7+11th Exercises

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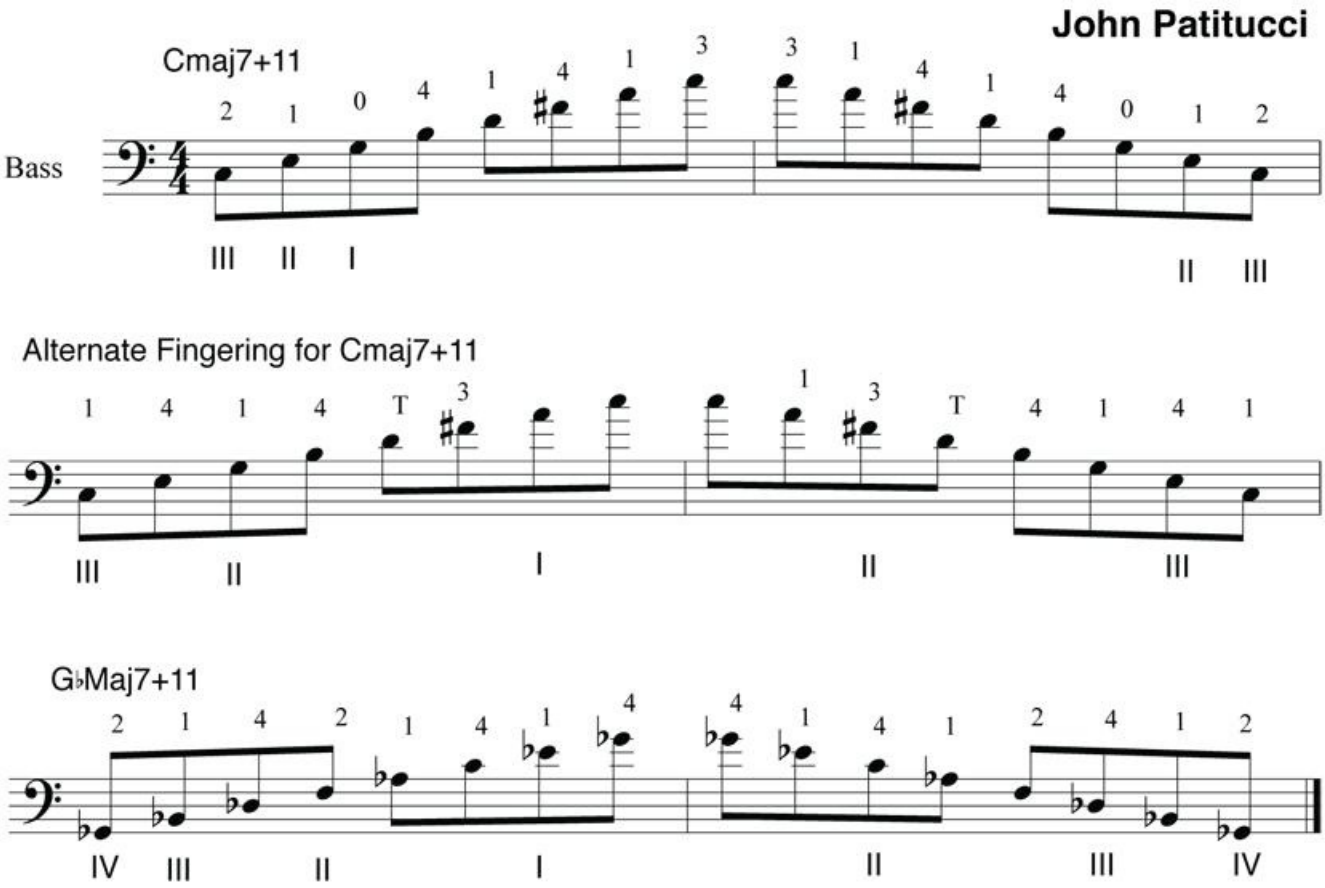
Introducing Triad Pairs

“Triad Pairs” refers to combining two or more triads to help us understand and improvise more freely over chords. It also helps us avoid relying solely on scales when improvising, a concept that saxophonists, pianists, and guitarists have used for a very long time. My goal is to make it practical for us bassists to utilize triad pairs, even though arpeggios on the bass are more physically demanding than on the aforementioned instruments.

Let’s take the C major 7+11 as a first example. If you stack a D major triad on top of the C major 7 arpeggio, it makes up the C major 7+11 chord. When looking at the D major triad, which contains the notes D, F#, and A, the D is the 9th of the C major 7th chord, the F# is the +11 and the A is the 13th. So, if you were to improvise, moving between the C major 7th arpeggio and D major triads, you could outline the sound of the C major 7+11. Of course, if you wanted to accent the major 7th (the B natural) using only triads, you could even add a third triad: E minor, made up of E, G, and B. If you want to combine three sounds at once, you could move between C major, D major, and E minor, and you would have a colorful representation of C major 7+11 using only triads.

In subsequent exercises, we will explore in depth how to combine these triads, but first, we need to be able to play the arpeggios in tune, in time, with a good sound, and with practical fingerings. You can also practice singing these arpeggios to hear the sounds more clearly.

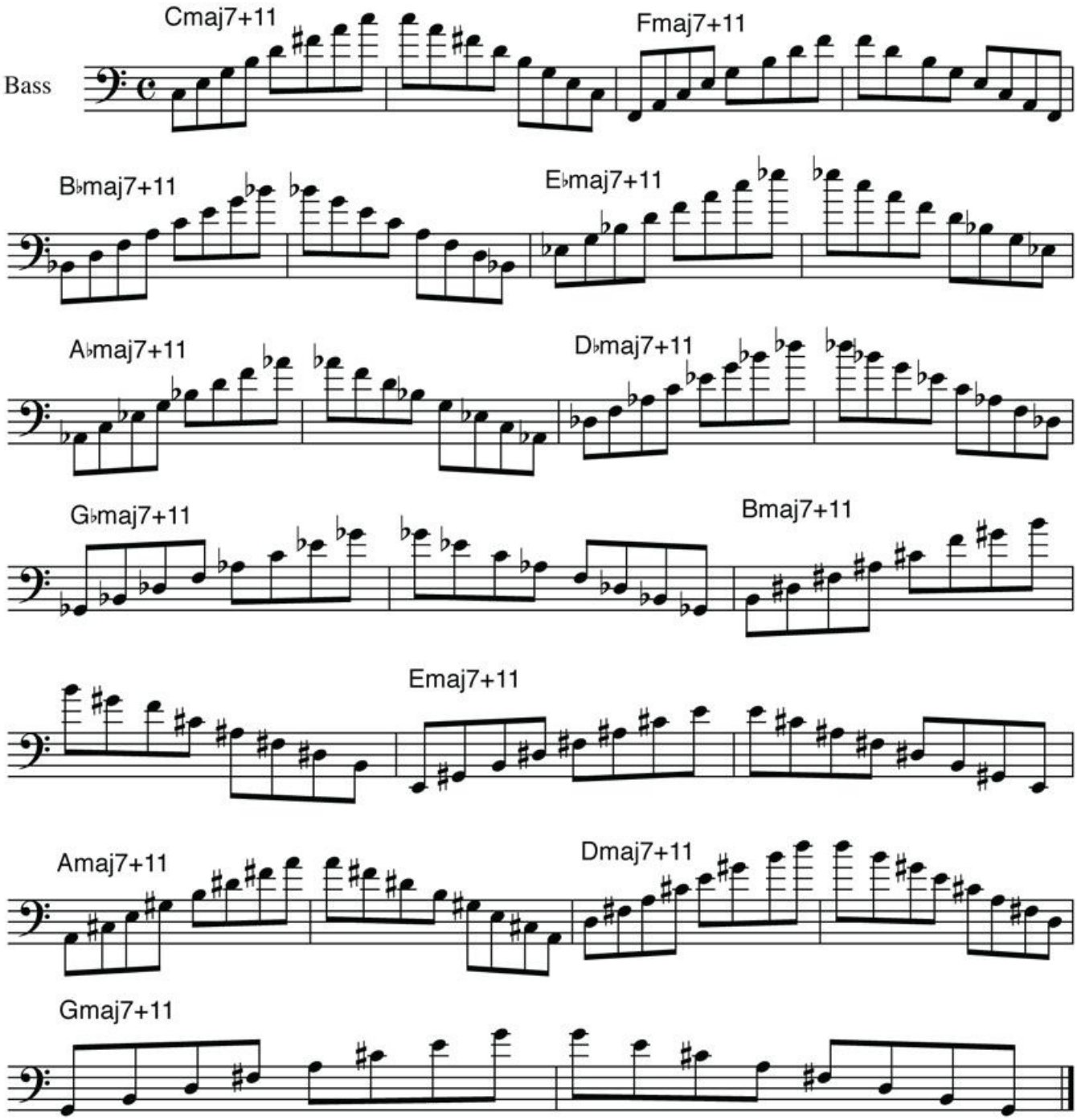
**Sample Fingerings for Major 7+11 arpeggio exercise**



**Major 7+11 arpeggio exercise**

VIA TRIAD PAIR - MAJOR 7TH ON THE BOTTOM
AND MAJOR TRIAD OFF OF THE MAJOR 2ND

**John Patitucci**



## Exercise 5
## Major 7+5 Exercises

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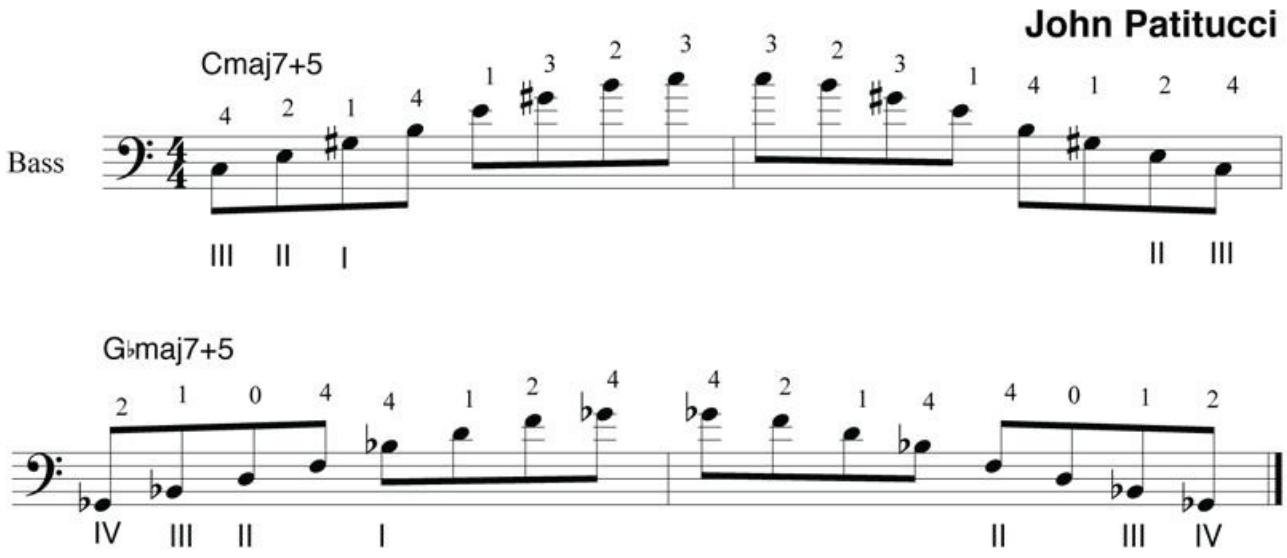
Continuing with Triad Pairs

As we continue through the major sounds with alterations, we arrive at the major 7+5 sound, which is augmented (the +5 defines it as such). The way I look at this chord in terms of a simple triad pair is this: We take the root (let's start with C) and then stack a major triad built from the third of the C major scale on top of it. For C major 7+5, it would be an E major triad. In subsequent material in this series, we will look at all of the triad pairs associated with this chord when linked to the augmented scale: C, Eb, E, G, G#, B, C, and its relative minor, the A melodic minor scale. However, we must first learn the basic arpeggio in all keys and get the sound of the chord in our ears, so we can learn to differentiate it from other chord qualities.

As with any of these arpeggio exercises, play them slowly, either with pizzicato or the bow. Practice connecting each note with a smooth shift and try bowing them with two, four, and eight notes in a bow, at different tempos. For pizzicato practice, try slurring with your left hand to connect two notes together when you are on the same string for both notes. For instance, in the case of the first arpeggio, C major 7+5, you could slur between the G# and B on beat two of bar one, playing both notes on the G string. You would play the G# with the 1st finger of your left hand while plucking the G string with your right hand. Then you would hammer* your 4th finger down for the B note without plucking the string with your right hand. Depending on your fingering choices, it is possible to work in different kinds of slurs with your left hand, so get creative and use your imagination. This is to help you develop different articulations and ways to color your attacks and releases, to cultivate expressive freedom.

* Use your finger to press down the next note with a quick hammer motion, with only the force of your finger and left hand.

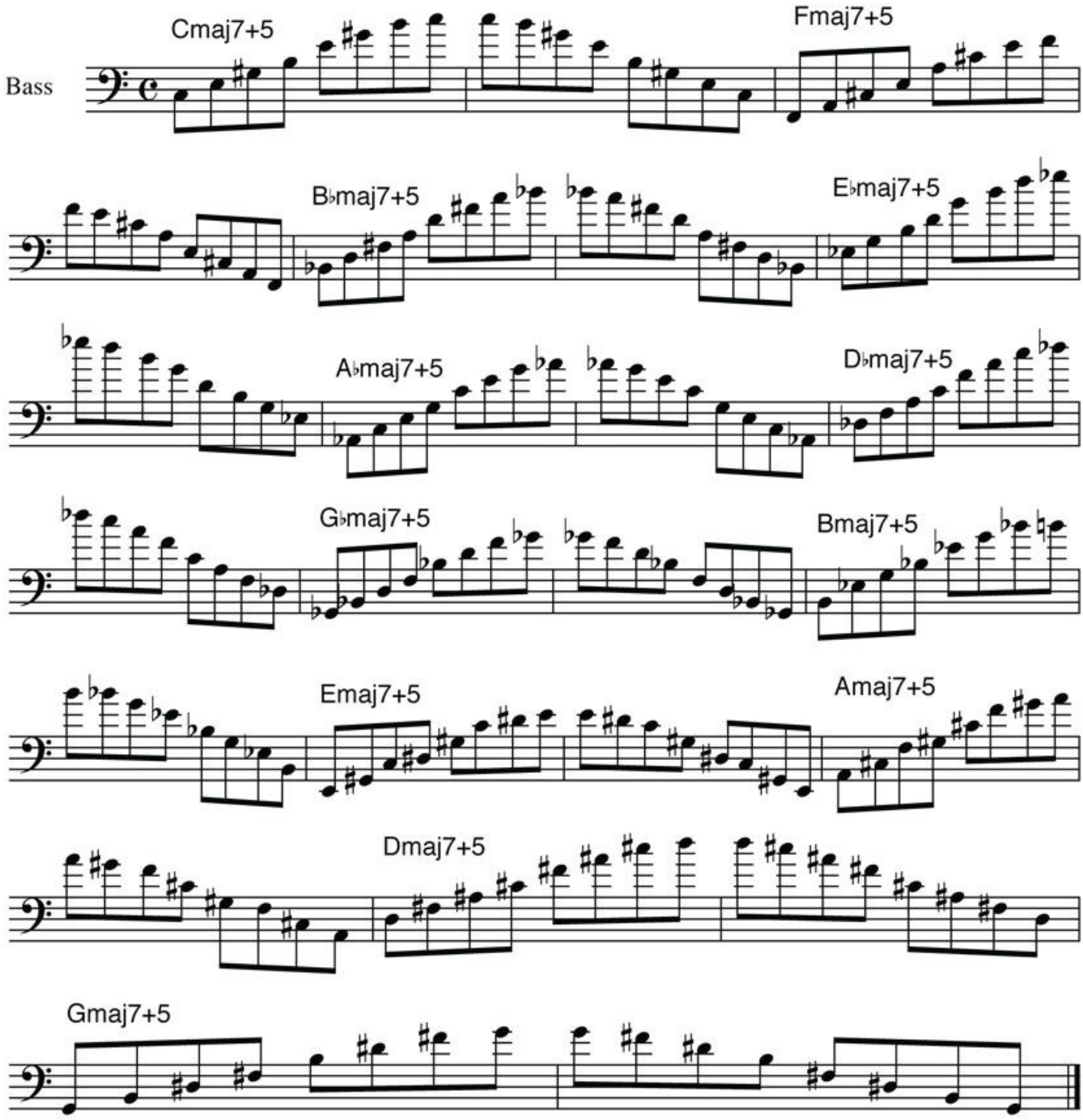
**Sample Fingerings for Major 7th+5 arpeggio exercise**



**Major 7th w+5 arpeggio exercise**

VIA TRIAD PAIR - AUGMENTED ON BOTTOM
AND A MAJOR TRIAD OFF OF THE MAJOR 3RD

**John Patitucci**



## Exercise 6
## Major Arpeggio Etude based on a theme by Bottesini

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This exercise was inspired by one of my greatest learning experiences: recording the Bottesini Duetto No.3 in D major for two basses, for an album called *Dialogues with the Double Bass* with my talented friend Jeremy McCoy (Metropolitan Opera Associate Principal Bassist). One movement of this Bottesini piece features an especially labor-intensive arpeggio workout. After practicing the piece for an entire year, recording it, and performing it live, I think I'll never forget those arpeggio sequences, but I wish I'd had this exercise when I initially learned them. I hope you find this helpful, whether or not you ever play Bottesini's music.

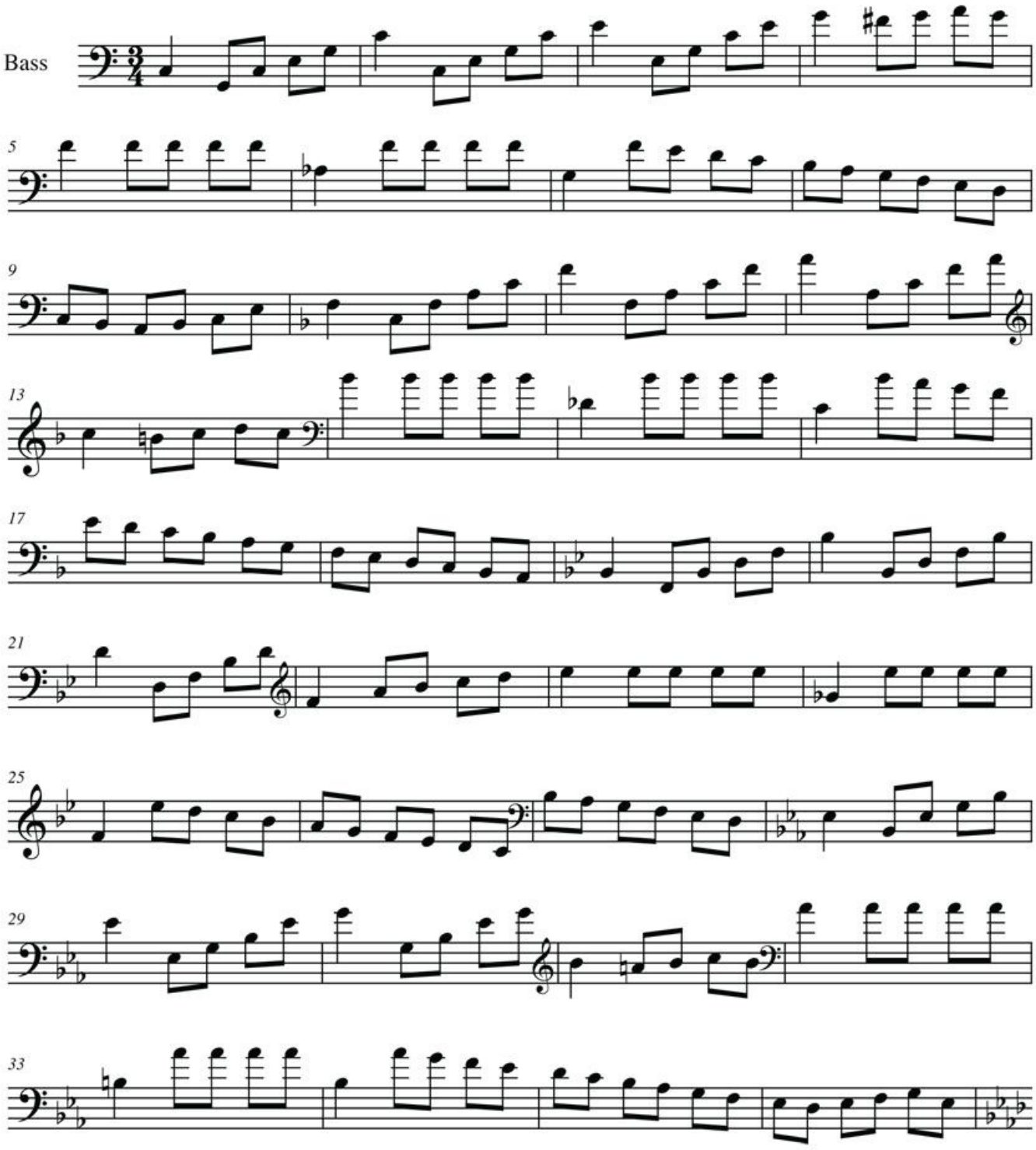
Many teachers (including myself) say that you should always practice these passages very slowly with a metronome and gradually increase the tempo. There is also another method, which I learned from one of my teachers years ago: practice the material very slowly five to ten times, measuring the shifts carefully, keeping your bow speed and weight distribution even and consistent (or keeping your pizzicato technique focused and even), getting a thick sound with core, playing evenly and thinking about the overall phrasing. Then, as the line goes up and down, adjust your dynamic level accordingly and try to make the line as musical as possible.

After five or ten slow passes through the material, play it once up to tempo. Now adjust your bowing or pizzicato to be a little lighter and more flexible. Learning to play fast with accuracy, musicality, and phrasing means we have to practice playing at those faster speeds too.

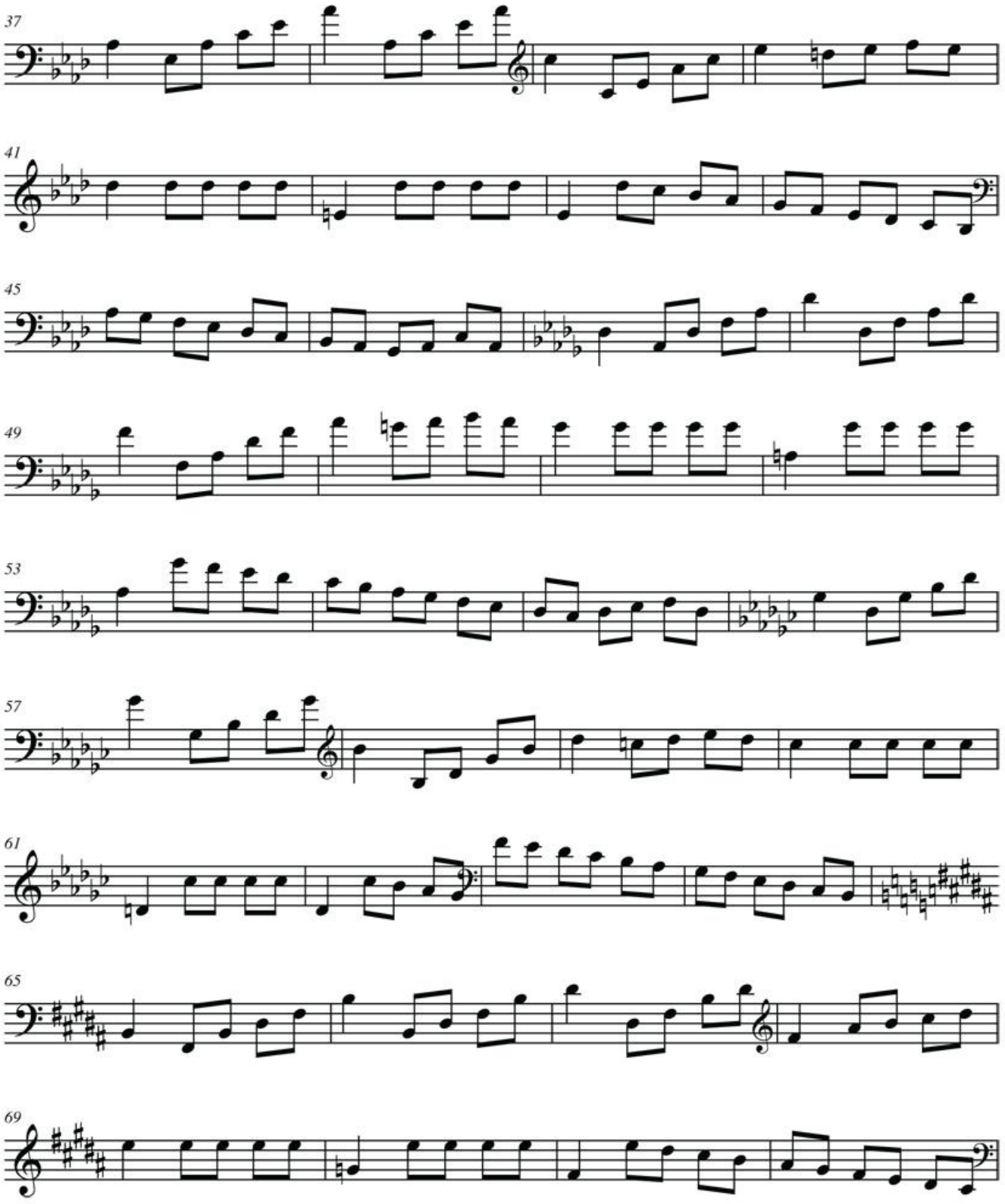
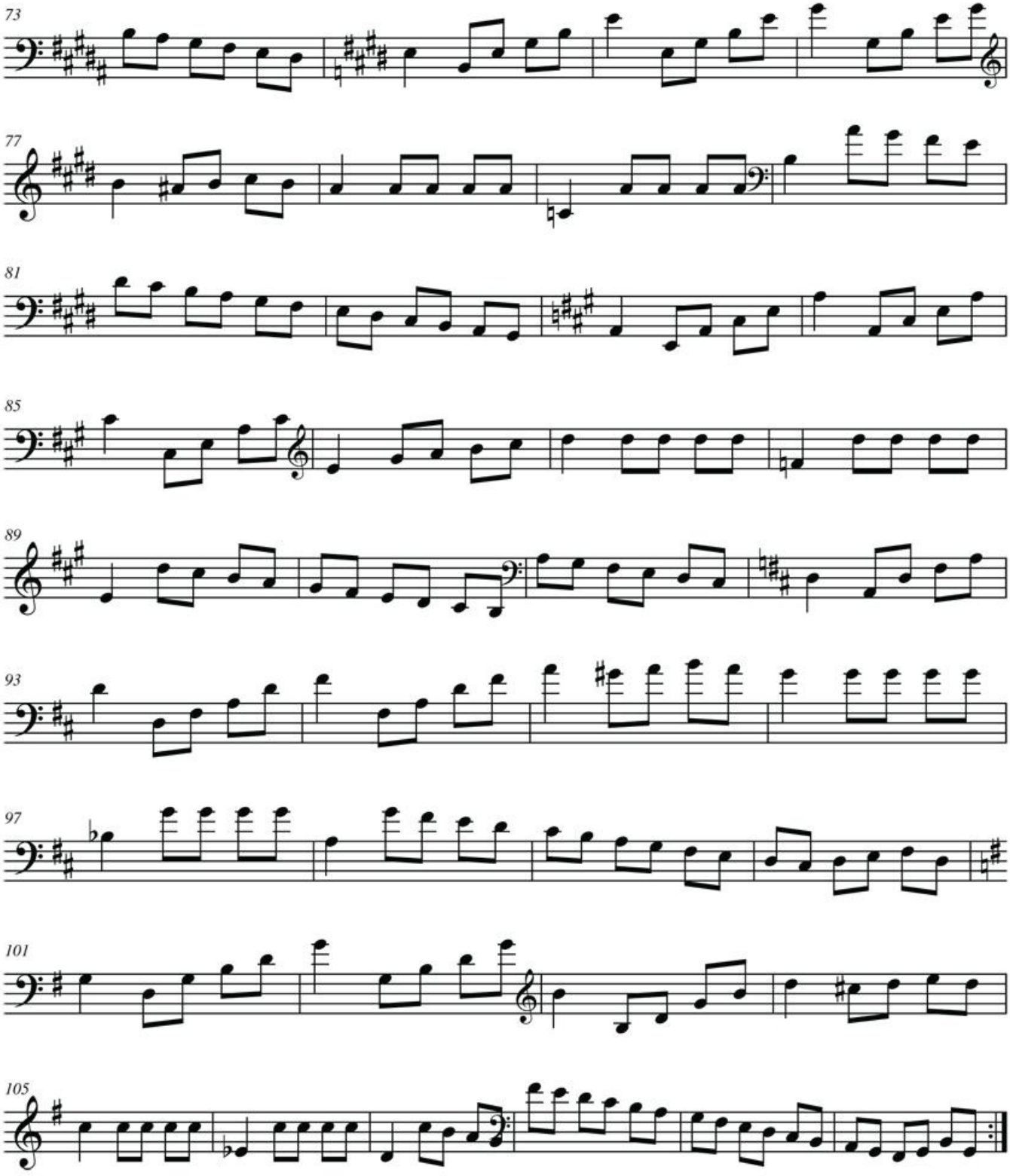
1. You can practice this with different bowings: on the string, off the string, all separate, all slurred, and in bar 7 of each sequence, try slurring the two eighth notes on beat two and then playing the rest of the descending eighth notes with short bows.
2. Challenge yourself to come up with fingerings that help your *sound*, not just your ease of shifting.
3. Don't settle for uneven rhythm or bad intonation at any speed!

# Major arpeggio etude on a theme by Bottesini

John Patitucci



**Major arpeggio etude on a theme by Bottesini**



**Major arpeggio etude on a theme by Bottesini**